

Skin Wealth - The Ultimate Long Only Investment

Over the Christmas and New Year break, I often find myself in the company of people from banking, finance and corporate leadership backgrounds. They are an engaging group: optimistic yet risk-aware, restless in the present but anchored by long-term planning, worldly, disciplined and deeply averse to the unnecessary loss of hard-won capital.

At a recent summer gathering, as a boisterous finance cohort compared sailing mishaps and holiday exploits — many wearing the tell-tale glow of several days on the water — I was encouraged to deliver the usual sermon on sunscreen and skin checks. It struck me that I might be better heard if I spoke their language. Skin health, after all, is not unlike financial health. It is about building, protecting and compounding a portfolio over time.

Think of it as skin wealth.

The power of compounding

Albert Einstein reportedly called compounding the eighth wonder of the world: “He who understands it earns it. He who doesn’t, pays it.” The same applies to health. We are the sum of our habits, and habits compound — quietly, relentlessly — for better or worse.

A few moments spent applying sunscreen each morning is the dermatological equivalent of a regular savings plan. The returns are substantial: healthier skin, preserved appearance, confidence, and a dramatically reduced risk of disfiguring and potentially fatal skin cancers. The absence of drama should not obscure the scale of the gain.

In medicine, compounding has a more literal meaning too. An experienced dermatologist, much like a skilled portfolio manager, constructs a tailored mix of evidence-based interventions — compound topical treatments; oral supplements; prescription medications; laser, injectable and surgical procedures; clinical surveillance — calibrated to an individual’s risks, needs and time horizon. There is no single “hot stock” that substitutes for a thoughtful strategy.

Actively choose habits that compound to improve your skin over a lifetime.

Risk management and capital preservation

Any seasoned investor knows the first rule: don't lose what you already have. In skin terms, your principal assets are epidermal quality, collagen, facial muscle and fat volume — the structural capital that supports appearance and function over a lifetime.

Collagen deserves particular respect. Production slows markedly after our early twenties, with visible losses emerging for most in their thirties. Environmental exposure, inflammation, oxidative stress and processed sugar all accelerate depletion. Sunscreen, antioxidants, measured exercise and a sensible diet are not lifestyle ornaments; they are asset-protection tools.

Ill-considered interventions may be just as destructive as neglect. Excessive use of botulinum toxin may weaken valuable facial muscles that animate and elevate the face; aggressive collagen directed and fat-dissolving treatments can permanently erode structural support. Even chronic stress and extreme exercise — familiar companions in high-finance circles — may drive premature loss of facial fat and muscle, producing the paradoxical effect of looking older rather than fitter.

Capital preservation matters. You cannot spend what you no longer own.

Do not abuse the foundational structures of your skin: collagen, muscle and fat. Build and preserve them.

Diversification beats concentration

“Don't put all your eggs in one basket” is advice as relevant to skin as it is to superannuation. Skin quality depends on multiple interrelated assets: surface texture and clarity, dermal collagen, muscle mass, tone and movement, and soft-tissue volume.

An overemphasis on one dimension often degrades another. Heavy-handed wrinkle-smoothing can hollow the face; excessive volumisation may compromise movement and expression. The result is distortion — the aesthetic equivalent of an undiversified portfolio undone by a single bad bet.

A good clinician, like a good adviser, assesses the whole balance sheet and rebalances thoughtfully over time.

Manage your skin as a whole – appreciate the diverse aspects that work together for lasting health, form and function.

Goals, plans and professional advice

Without goals, portfolios drift. The same is true of health. “I want better skin” is not a clear objective. “I want to look and feel better in five years than I do today, while minimising my risk of skin cancer” is.

Goals require action plans, lest they remain dormant wishes: daily sun protection, periodic skin checks, appropriate use of proven treatments, and adequate insurance or savings for unforeseen medical costs. Paying for expert advice is not indulgent; it compresses the learning curve and avoids expensive mistakes; saving time and money in the long term.

Skin, like markets, changes with time. What serves you in your twenties differs from what you need in your forties or sixties. Regular review and recalibration are essential.

Define your goals, make a plan and stick to it. Considered adjustments are helpful over time.

Time, tax and the ultimate constraint

In finance, tax quietly erodes returns. In life, time does the same. Ageing skin reflects accumulated exposure to ultraviolet radiation, oxidative stress and inflammation. Each day extracts a small levy. Minimising that tax — through protection and sensible habits — is one of the most powerful ways to slow the visible passage of time.

Some people face higher “tax rates” than others: fair skin, blue eyes, blond and red hair, multiple moles, outdoor occupations and recreation, family history. Knowing your risk profile matters.

Time waits for no one. Do not magnify the vagaries of time by avoidable skin stresses.

Legacy and perspective

Portfolio thinking should extend beyond the individual. Pass on lessons — about sunburns suffered, cancers treated, and money wasted on ill-considered interventions. Take photographs with people you love. One day, even today’s imperfect images will look impossibly young and carefree.

And finally, a note on perspective. The fact that you have the leisure and resources to read this already places you among the world's most wealthy. Money is a powerful abstraction, but it generally solves only money problems. It does not stop time, restore health, buy happiness or substitute for it.

Health is the asset that makes all others usable. As the saying goes, the person with health has a thousand wishes; the person without has but one. Tend to your skin as you would a valued portfolio — patiently, thoughtfully and with respect for the long term.

Appreciate and value each moment with gratitude.

General advice only, of course. But still: wear sunscreen. And get your skin checked.

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